

# Transforming Education Through Service-Learning

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## Abstract

**Background:** Service-learning is a pedagogical practice which requires students to learn through engaged service-based community activities. Service-learning requires students become active members in their community. Through this practice student influence their communities, putting their knowledge to use. As a method of instruction, service-learning emphasizes both the service and the learning goals in such a way that both occur and are enriched by each other. This approach helps students realize the importance of learning and the meaning behind curricular choices.

**Focus of discussion:** The current paper discusses the power of service-learning as a transformative educational practice. Many believe that service-learning empowers students to do their best work. Students can affect their communities in unimaginable ways. Through the integration of quality service-learning practices, teachers and students realize the importance of being active citizens.

**Comments:** Students make significant impacts on their communities by participating in service-learning programs. Such programs transform curriculum, realigning learning with experience and empowerment. Yet, such programs are not merely community service; the practice connects the classrooms and curriculum to community needs.

**Conclusion:** From the experience of the author as a practicing service-learning professional and facilitator, information is provided which can assist teachers at all levels of education to initiate service-learning as a pedagogical practice. In this way teachers can become stronger facilitators of students' learning and stewardship.

**Keywords:** service-learning, civic engagement, pedagogy

## 通過學習服務去轉化教育

**背景：**學習服務是一種實踐教學方法，要求學生通過參與服務社區活動去學習，學習服務要求學生成為社區的活躍成員，通過這實踐，學生影響他們的社區，學為使用他們的知識。作為一種實踐教學方法，學習服務強調服務和學習的目標，讓兩者共存和彼此增潤。這種方法幫助學生體會學習的重要性和課程抉擇之背後原因。

**討論焦點：**本文談論學習服務作為轉化教育實踐的力量，許多人相信，學習服務會幫助學生達成他們最佳水平的工作。學生能用難以想像的方式去影響他們的社區，通過整合實踐有質素的服務學習，老師和學生意識到活躍公民的重要性。

**評論：**學生由參加服務學習的計劃對他們的社區造成的大衝擊，這些計劃轉化課程，重新以經驗和活力化去調較學習。然而，這些計劃不僅僅是社區服務；實踐使教室和課程能連接到社區的需要。

**總結：**從作者的經驗作為實踐服務學習的專家和促進者，提供資訊可協助老師在所有的教育階段開始實施服務學習作為實踐的教學方法，這樣老師能成為學生學習更好的促進者和管家。

**關鍵詞：**學習服務、公民契約、教學方法

## Doing the Impossible: Transforming Education through Service-Learning

### Overview

Service-learning is a pedagogical practice which requires students to learn through engaged service-based community activities. Service-learning requires students become active members in their community. Through

this practice student influence their communities, putting their knowledge to use. As a method of instruction, service-learning emphasizes both the service and the learning goals in such a way that both occur and are enriched by each other. This approach helps students realize the importance of learning and the meaning behind curricular choices. The current paper discusses the power of service-learning as a transformative

educational practice. Many believe that service-learning empowers students to do their best work. Students can affect their communities in unimaginable ways. Through the integration of quality service-learning practices, teachers and students realize the importance of being active citizens.

Students make significant impacts on their communities by participating in service-learning programs. Such programs transform curriculum, realigning learning with experience and empowerment. Yet, such programs are not merely community service; the practice connects the classrooms and curriculum to community needs. From the experience of the author as a practicing service-learning professional and facilitator, information is provided which can assist teachers at all levels of education to initiate service-learning as a pedagogical practice. In this way can teachers become stronger facilitators of students' learning and stewardship.

Students make significant impacts on their communities by participating in service-learning programs. Such programs transform curriculum, realigning learning with experience and empowerment. Yet, such programs are not merely community service; the practice connects the classrooms and curriculum to community needs. From the experience of the author as a practicing service-learning professional and facilitator, information is provided which can assist teachers at all levels of education to initiate service-learning as a pedagogical practice. In this way can teachers become stronger facilitators of students' learning and stewardship. Community service as a practice does not connect with academic standards or the curriculum students are to learn; instead, community service is primarily

based on the needs of the community (Benson, 2002).

Many people think that community service and service-learning are one and the same. While service-learning involves community service, they are two different concepts. Community service is defined as a form of volunteerism. It is done within a defined community, which could be a classroom, school, town, city, etc. It has no intentional tie to learning; the emphasis is strictly on the service. The service should drive the learning. As opposed to community service, service-learning focuses connecting the curriculum with a community need. As a method of instruction, service-learning emphasizes both the service and the learning goals in such a way that both occur and are enriched by each other. This approach helps students realize the importance of understanding why they are doing a project for the community. Students involved with service-learning also are "learning by doing" (Rama, 1998).

Service-learning combines service with in-depth student learning that can benefit students, schools, and community members. It goes beyond volunteerism because it increases students' personal involvement in academic and civic life (Allen, 2003). One unique facet of service-learning is the ability for students, teachers, parents, and citizens to be involved as equal participants in resolving pressing needs faced by a community. While students and teachers are active members engaged in exploring the problems that a citizenry faces, a critical component to effective service-learning requires that citizens have an active voice in sharing their concerns, guiding the learning process, and being involved in all phases of project completion.

The goal of service-learning is to help students become responsible citizens, while simultaneously learning the curriculum (Allen, 2003). This method of teaching can be used as an alternative to traditional methods in the classroom, or it can be incorporated as a part of other experiential methods. In order for this method to be successful, it is important to receive and maintain support from the school and community. Without community partners from business, industry, and other active facets of the citizenry involvement; it is difficult to find success with service-learning.

### Review of Service-Learning

Service-learning was defined in its early stages as the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth. More recently service-learning has been defined as a form of experiential learning and teaching that achieves course objectives while meeting an identified community need. Experiential learning is often thought of as a hands-on, practical form of learning, but experiential education is not the only cornerstone of service-learning. Service-learning also is a differentiated practice that helps all students to learn, involves students in their community, and is a sound pedagogical and evaluative tool (Cairn & Kielsmeier, 1991).

Although service-learning has been used for decades, it has not been referred to always by this name. For example, John Dewey wrote some ideas on democratic education that parallels what service-learning is considered to be today. During the 1930s William Kirkpatrick wrote "Project Methods" in which he believed learning should not be taught exclusively within the classroom. The concept of

service-learning found renewal during the 1960s and 1970s during a time of chaos and change in communities and college campuses. Student activists and educators began breaking away from teacher-centered style of conducting a classroom. During these movements, a small number of individuals were concerned with structuring learning with the community. Their labor laid the groundwork for what is now known as service-learning (Cairn & Kielsmeier, 1991). In the past decade, service-learning has regained its following and has become a sturdy foundation in today's classroom.

### Eight Key Elements of Service-Learning

There are eight key elements that should be considered when developing a service-learning program. Although these elements differ based on the individuals performing service, the following eight elements are generally considered to be critical to a program if it is to be successful (Sullivan, 2007).

Youth or student voice. The first element is youth or student voice. This element assures that students have an active role in what they are doing in the community. As a teacher it is important to remember that in order for students to benefit from the service, they need to be active in the process of the project. The service project needs to be appropriate for the specific age group being taught. Along with this students should help in the execution of the project.

Listening to and engaging youth in the service-learning process provides more ownership and greater learning opportunities. When engaged in service-learning activities, students experience significant age-appropriate challenges involving tasks that require thinking, initiative and problem-solving as they demonstrate responsibility and

decision-making. However, such outcomes only occur when they are performed in an environment safe enough to allow students to make mistakes and to succeed. As such service-learning environments should allow students to actively participate in choosing and planning age-appropriate service projects, implementing the service project, and conducting needs assessment process. Further, it is important that before and after events and activities, students develop and implement reflection sessions, evaluation and recognition, as well as create and foster community and/or faith based partnerships (Learn and Serve Indiana, 2007).

Meaningful service and civic engagement. The second element critical to an effective service-learning experience is meaningful service through civic engagement. Students should work for a common goal together. This will help them benefit the community and realize how a democracy works. Students learn to become active engaged citizens when they have a voice in that classroom's processes. The service also needs to be such from which the community can truly benefit. Along with this students should be prepared for whatever rigors their service will require.

Meaningful service-learning also starts with the acknowledgement of the strengths, assets, and contributions that each partner makes toward the success of the project. Reciprocity, the give-and-take between partners that build on each other's strengths to address each other's needs, is a huge theme within service-learning. Meaningful/high quality service should respond to an authentic community need through inclusive partnerships with community members. A meaningful dialogue should be fostered between

those being served and youth participants in the design of the program. Students must identify the roles of teachers, partners, and themselves to achieve success in all areas. A final important component of the service-learning journey is learning the fine art of beginning new relationships, understanding how to work with others, and navigating the various pathways to accomplishing a task (Watkins and Brawn, 2005). Students need to understand the roles and tasks of teachers, the partners, and students, themselves, as service-learning collaborators.

Whenever possible a successful service experience should engage young people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good. When young people have a role in improving society, especially when working for social justice and caring for the environment, then they truly understand the concept of democracy. Students recognize how participation and the ability to respond to authentic needs improve the quality of life in the community and advocate for social change, which may lead to a lifelong ethic of service and civic engagement. Meaningful service also requires thorough planning of goals, resources, training, supervision, transportation, logistics and risk management.

Reflection. Reflection is a key component to the service-learning practice. This reflection engages students in thoughtful recollection that leads to heightened understanding of learning and relevant transfer of learning and skills. Students can use a variety of tools and strategies to reflect on their experiences. Daily learning logs, journals, audiotapes, time-sheets, and peer-partnering sessions are all great ways to reflect on an activity.

In order for students to learn from their service experience, program leaders must provide structured opportunities for students to reflect critically on the service experience. Student reflection takes place before, during and after service. Reflection also should use multiple methods (so to meet the multiple needs of diverse groups of students). It also is critical that reflection be designed to encourage critical thinking. Such techniques are to be a central force in the design and fulfillment of curricular activities. Reflection encourages students to form and test opinions, discuss actions and reactions, and make improvements in future plans (Learn and Serve Indiana, 2007).

Authentic needs assessment. The assessment and evaluation of a service-learning project must be determined before students begin working at the project site. Teachers should use a variety of authentic assessment strategies to gather information about student learning during service activities and to determine the final grade when the project is completed. Checklists can be used to gather information about how often students contribute to the activity, how engaged they are in their work, how much work each student does, and how well each student works with members of the project team. Other factors to check may be punctuality, preparation, and consistency. Students and teacher can brainstorm a list of elements to add to the checklist before beginning work.

Further, service-learning projects should meet real community needs. In order to provide authentic learning opportunities for youth, programs must actively engage the community in identifying needs. By addressing an important community need, student actions take on greater value and

importance. Students can then see their actions making an impact even as they learn and apply academic skills. Authentic needs assessment is often verified through various sources of media, conducting surveys, observation, community mapping and research, census information or discussion with an informed community member (Sullivan, 2007).

Academic Connections. Another key element of service-learning is connecting curriculum and academic standards to service-learning. By far this is the most significant aspect in ensuring the success of projects within P – 12 educational settings, as it is essential in times of school accountability for teachers to justify how their pedagogical practices are meeting academic standards. This will enable teacher to verify that learning is taking place, and students are benefiting from service-learning. Through these experiences in the community, learning can be enhanced.

True service-learning happens when service is integrated into the classroom curriculum and aligned with state academic standards. Service-learning programs enhance learning through real life, experiential activities. Academics come alive and knowledge is applied through: interaction, research, critical thinking, literature, problem solving, discussion and planning for action. Service-learning allows teachers to tap into students' prior knowledge bases. It is imperative to connect curriculum with prior knowledge, so that students can merge previous knowledge with new knowledge. When the knowledge needed to be learned is linked to prior knowledge, it becomes more meaningful to the student. They can see the connection between their life and learning. It allows them to realize that

knowledge is connected and multiple subjects can be learned at one time. Students are better able to connect pieces of knowledge and make sense of it.

**Collaboration.** Service-learning cannot be done without the help of the school, community or parents. Through this collaboration students will better connect with people outside of their school. They will understand the importance of working with people with a variety of backgrounds. Students will learn to appreciate and respect other members of the community. They will feel comfortable going out into the community and asking for help. Students participate in the development of partnerships and share responsibility with parents, teachers, community and faith-based organizations and higher education. These relationships present opportunities to interact with people of diverse backgrounds and settings. Finally, service-learning experiences provide students and community partners the opportunity to learn about each other, resulting in mutual respect, understanding and appreciation (Sullivan, 2007).

**Evaluation.** In order to know whether or not students are learning, it is necessary to have some form of evaluation or assessment. Along with knowing the progress of students, the community should be able to see the impact students have had on them. Evaluation helps teachers realize the strengths and weaknesses of their service-learning project. This will allow for improvement of the project in the future.

Throughout the service experience, youth and adults should analyze the process (what was done) and the impact (results) of the service. Effective evaluation is essential for

assessing the outcomes of service-learning programs, for making decisions about improving the program, and for strengthening support for the program in the school district and community. The best evaluation efforts are woven into the fabric of the program from its inception. Initial questions focus on information that is needed and desired, identification of those who will use the evaluation information, and determination of the appropriate methods for collection of the needed information. Creation of performance measures are required for Learn and Serve Indiana programs

**Recognition.** The final element of service-learning is to recognize students' completion of the project. It always is important to recognize the accomplishments of students, especially when they have made an impact on the community. Not only will publicity recognize students, it will draw attention to the project. This will help motivate people to get out in the community and possibly get more support for the continuation of service-learning projects.

Given service-learning's goal of youth empowerment and community collaboration, recognition of participants in the school and the community is an important means for rewarding meaningful service. When participants learn new skills, engage in risk taking, take on new responsibilities and offer their hearts and hands to others, it is appropriate to honor and recognize their efforts. Recognition does not have to happen just at the end of a program, but should be on-going to foster a sense of accomplishment. Recognition events provide opportunities to publicize the program, gain new supporters and members, as well as, motivate participants to continue a life of service (Sullivan, 2007).

## Implementation of Service-Learning

In order for service-learning to be effective, service-learning must be an integral part of a school's curriculum. The process of using service-learning in the classroom provides students with authentic practices. If a teacher's main objective is to have competent, critical thinking students, teacher must be able to modify lessons and activities to fit the needs of all students. For students relate the curriculum to their personal lives, provide an environment that reveals the multiple meanings of material, and allow students to see the dynamic nature of information (Slavkin, 2004) is priceless. This active involvement gives students a sense of pride within themselves and a love for learning.

Allowing students to realize that problems, mistakes, and concerns within a community are challenges awaiting a solution is a component of service-learning. Students can then brainstorm ways to meet challenges and correct these problems using a community based-education. Students must first select the need for service, select a community partner, align the service with the educational goals, manage the actual project or activity, and reflect on what they have learned throughout the project (Berman, 1999).

Examining need. In selecting the need for a certain community, students may find out what problems exist and what already is being done to solve these problems. This investigation can include talking to parents, other teachers, and community leaders. Students may look for organizations that have partnered with the community to help resolve certain troubles and team up with those organizations to provide insight and ideas on resolving the situation. Service-learning benefits the community by supplying it with regular assistance to

provide any needed service, allowing it to feel valued and appreciated by their fellow community members, increasing an awareness of any bias or stereotypes of teachers and students it may have had, and creating a bond with local schools to seek out additional resources and assistance (Watkins & Braun, 2005).

Selecting partners. To select a community partner, teacher and students will want to contact appropriate community agencies to ask if they would be willing to be the partner for the project. Teacher's job is to establish agency interest, network with an agency person who will be the project liaison, and set up an appointment date to discuss the project in more detail (Berman, 1999). Goals and objectives should be outlined in the meeting, and the number of students participating, what kinds of work they are willing to do, and how teacher and students visual the project's development should be discussed.

Developing educational goals. Educational goals must be met in each activity in which students participate. These goals should be clearly stated and aligned with the academic and service project work. Students will be able to transfer what they have learned about academic content, the community, and themselves as service providers by reflecting on the service-learning experience. Every participant in the project must not lose sight of the curricular and service goals. They must know the indicators that show that students are learning the educational content and skills that align with the service and life skills goals for the project. The service project gives students the rich experiences that lead to lifelong learning of content, skills, and attitudes (Berman, 1999).

Managing the project. Managing the project involves three key concepts: preparation, monitoring, and evaluation. Once the class has decided on the service-learning task and aligned it with the goals they have chosen, students need to pick a site for the service, plan what to do and who will do it when students are at the service site, arrange for students' transportation to and from the site, and plan adult participation in the project (Berman, 1999). Giving feedback, planning future project work, reviewing goals, and troubleshooting are all part of monitoring the project. Self-evaluation is another good way to monitor students' work. It is imperative that teacher is well prepared for the project. Preparation will enable the project to be run much smoother and will make things easier for all those participating in the project. Plus, it allows teacher, students, and community to see what direction the project is going and the benefits that the community will gain.

### Service-Learning Practices

Service-learning uses methods and principals that help it to be easily implemented and identified with. One of the core principles is for students to have an active voice. Students should have a voice in the nature of their involvement with their community service. Students' choice and decision making also should be encouraged and respected, giving students an opportunity to have a say in what assignments and work they will be spending a large portion of their time on. Most believe that this will help students do their best work.

The following four items are criteria that must be met to constitute a service-learning project (Servicelearning.org, 2007). Service-learning is:

1. Positive, meaningful and real to the participants
2. Cooperative rather than competitive experiences; promotes teamwork and citizenship
3. Addresses complex problems in complex settings rather than simplified problems in isolation
4. Engaging in problem-solving in the specific context of service activities and community challenges, rather than generalized or abstract concepts from a textbook

Common mistakes when organizing a project are:

1. Planning an episodic volunteer program
2. Requiring a student complete minimum service hours in order to graduate
3. Assigning service as a form of punishment
4. One-sided: benefiting only students or only the community
5. Using the term "cooperative education," when in fact the project is service-learning (more than just based on experiential strategies)
6. Using the term "internships" (Servicelearning.org, 2007).

Using any of these characteristics will give a false sense of accomplishment to students. Further, when teachers attempt to meet academic standards set forth by the state, they often will struggle for meaningful connections. When superficial connections are made, teachers often find that it wasn't worth while for teacher, the community, or students.

Many teachers agree that the most effective way to teach students is to provide them opportunities to make

knowledge meaningful and relevant. Students who are in charge of their learning are more likely to make deeper connections with the material. Even though this is sound pedagogical practice, it is critical for another reason: in changing their relationship with material, students also may be changing the way they think. Learner empowerment and personalization of information is thought to make neural connections stronger than they would be without student empowerment. As such, service-learning can have huge implications for improving student understanding because it helps to personalize information and affords students a position of power within the school, a situation that is not always possible in traditional classrooms.

Further, students who participate in service-learning are given an opportunity to participate in a democratic classroom where their voice is heard in decisions made in the class. Being a part of a democratic classroom will help students feel free to express themselves, feel accepted as individuals and valued as participants in a group (Larrivee, 2002). Service-learning also offers several opportunities for students to gain new skills, to apply knowledge in challenging situations and contribute to others' lives in meaningful ways (Swick, 2001).

### Benefits of Service-Learning

Service-learning uses methods and principles that help it to be easily implemented and identified with. These principals help make sure that students are getting to maximize their service-learning experiences. For example, one of the principles is for students to have an active voice. Students should have a voice in the nature of their involvement with their community service. Students' choice

and decision making should be encouraged and respected, giving students an opportunity to have a say in what assignments and work they will be spending a large portion of their time on. Most believe that this will help students do their best work (Waterman, 1997). These are all important aspects to a well rounded educational career.

Service-learning provides students with opportunities such as learning from experience, linking personal and interpersonal development with academic development, learning and being actively involved in the process of social problem solving, and increasing citizenship through social responsibility. Many healthy effects have been noted in students participating in service-learning activities. Students have been able to boost their self-confidence, gain pride in themselves and their abilities, and feel more a part of their community. Students are better able to participate in higher order thinking. Teachers also have seen a decrease in students' involvement with risky behavior and relationships develop between adults (Billig, 2002). Every student has the potential to benefit from participating in the service-learning project.

Service-learning strengthens students in many different ways. Certain effects have been observed in students who participate in service-learning activities. Students have found an increase in self-pride, an improved connection with their community, and a feeling of ownership of their community and their school curriculum (Nix, 2001; Sandler & Vangriff, 1995; Schine, 1997). Newmann and Rutter (1983) showed that involvement in service-learning projects by secondary students modestly increased students' sense of social responsibility and personal competence. Green (1989) and Bucher and Hall

(1998) have found that service-learning involvement with elementary and secondary at-risk students may provide them with the interventions necessary to succeed in school.

**Self-Esteem.** Lantieri (1999) showed that at-risk students involved in a service-learning program that emphasized conflict resolution and social values increased the esteem of students. Students indicated that the opportunity to work with the community and relate it to the curriculum of the school helped give them a sense of success not previously found at school. Moores (1999) found that a group of high-risk adolescent girls were more likely to show high self-esteem following involvement with service-learning projects that included an adult mentoring component. Similar results were found by Youniss, McLellan, Su, and Yates (1999). In a study of 13,000 high school seniors, the authors found that service to the community increased identity orientation and that such students showed a greater acceptance of themselves and their ability to move themselves beyond any environmental or familial issues (for further information, also see Serow, 1991).

**Self-Efficacy.** Results from a qualitative study of at-risk, socially neglected students showed that involvement in service-learning provided improved sense of efficacy, and that students were more likely to engage in peer interactions during the learning activities (Rosenberg, McKeon, and Dinero, 1999). Berv (1998) provides qualitative and descriptive evidence that involvement with service-learning activities can increase at-risk students' sense of self-efficacy and help these students feel like schools are meeting their individual learning styles and needs.

**Ownership of community.** Meyers (1999) suggests that the curriculum of any school include aspects of (a) experiential learning, (b) reflection about the learning as it occurs, and (3) an understanding of the workplace within the broader social context so to improve students' sense of involvement with community (Meyers, 1999). Though Newmann and Rutter (1983) found that involvement in service-learning increased students' sense of social responsibility and personal competence, they did not find that similar changes occurred in students' ownership of the community.

Research on the impact of service-learning for students identified as at-risk is limited. Some information exists which shows the improvement of problem-solving skills, social competence, and a sense of purpose (see Bernard, 1991). However, to date research in the area of service-learning has mainly utilized qualitative reflective writing as the major source of evaluation. Most of these reflections do show an increase in students' overall perception of themselves, their school, and their community. Although qualitative evaluation has been used extensively, there remains a need for stronger quantitative measurement of the effects of service-learning on the providers (Billig, 2000). Although service-learning activities have been observed to increase self-esteem, self-efficacy, ownership of the community, and ownership of the curriculum, there is no quantitative data to date that has been collected to verify this fact empirically.

**Ownership of the school curriculum.** The Oregon Department of Education (2000) found that a relationship existed between the ownership of school events and their academic performance, attendance, attitudes, motivation, and post high school success, especially when

investigating students found to be at-risk. Critical in preserving this process of ownership of the school curriculum was the usefulness and sense of belonging that was identified within the curriculum. One key form of programming which showed strength in each of these areas was service-learning. Similar results were found by Bernard (1991), Berv (1998) and Butcher and Hall (1998), each who reported that students involved in service-learning often show improved attendance and lower disciplinary referrals, two indicators of improved acceptance of school roles.

Further, the schools get to make students' learning based more on their everyday lives. Teacher also benefits by becoming more of an adviser and guide than an instructor. When involving more than one class, teachers can work collaboratively. Service-learning is easily implemented in to the curriculum, and interdisciplinary teaching is made easier through such projects. Moreover, service-learning can be done at any grade level. It is teacher's responsibility to adapt different projects to meet the needs of their students. Teachers should use infusion when doing service-learning. Infusion is taking core subjects, like math, science, etc, and including them in the service-learning project. For example, English students who study persuasive essays pick issues to research and draft position papers suggesting policy actions which they then send to their legislators (Honnet and Poulson, 2000). Another form of infusion is cross-curricular. An example of this is one hundred students working together to rehabilitate a public field adjacent to their school. This activity would incorporate science, English, math, etc. Infusing service-learning helps students understand the relevance of the material taught in the classroom. They establish connections to the community and solve real world

problems by applying knowledge acquired in the classroom (Honnet and Poulson, 2000). The core subjects can get monotonous sometimes, and infusion allows teacher to be more creative and keep students' attention.

### Service-Learning in P – 12 Education

Service-learning can be implemented at almost any level of education. Research has shown that it can be beneficial to any age level. Many times service-learning is implemented into middle schools and high schools. Service-learning generally has more of an impact on high school students (Billig, 2002). These projects start off basic in the lower levels, and the older students are the more complex they become. It is important to keep students active and excited about the project they are participating in. Students should know what they are trying to accomplish before they begin the project, so they will be able to assess themselves at the end. Students at all levels will develop new-found loves for life-long activities they might have otherwise not been exposed to.

Primary classrooms. The impact a service-learning project can have on primary classrooms will open students' eyes to new experiences otherwise taken for granted. Collaborative efforts with community leaders and teachers could lead them through the process of a key element in their lives. This way the children would learn from others and themselves. If a child sees a topic in another light, he/she may be able to offer insight that would teach adults. Exposing students to their civic responsibility through means of fun, hands-on education at a young age will possibly foster a need for that student to take part in a yearly learning spree. Even if their class doesn't participate in a service-learning project

that year, they may feel the need to help in some way. And if parents are involved with the first service-learning project the child participated in, they will be more apt to support their child's love of helping others. The earlier they realize the impact they have on their community, the more productive of a citizen they will become.

Intermediate classrooms. At the Hurley K-12 School in Hurley, Wisconsin, the intermediate students constructed flower and vegetable gardens around the signs of their school and a local market. In order to complete their projects, some of students appeared before the school board, the farmer's market board and the University of Wisconsin Extension Board to obtain permission. Having students present their own case gives them more ownership to the project. During the students phase at this age and down, thank you cards and basic surveys could be sent and conducted. This way they will realize how much they made a difference.

Middle school classrooms. At this age, students struggle with many issues. The positive impacts of service-learning can make the tough times of middle school aged children a bit easier. Service-learning projects can bring students together no matter their initial conceived notions toward one another. They will see strengths in their fellow classmates that they might not see in the classroom. Learning by engaging in hands-on activities could provide them an outlet to troubles they may have. If they realize their voices are heard, they would most likely continue to strive to accomplish things that are important to them and their community.

High school classrooms. Even as early as 9<sup>th</sup> grade, students have ideas of what they would like to do after high

school. Providing them, as educators, with resources and links to the outside "real world" is our duty. Through service-learning a student may recognize an unfilled void in his life and choose to dedicate his or her career to a certain agency. Not only can it change the student's outlook, but it also could re-affirm the need for a student to pursue a life-long dream.

### Conclusions

Significant changes can be seen with respect to students' self-efficacy, ownership of the community, and ownership of their curriculum when teachers utilize service-learning. Service-learning has been shown to have significant curricular and pedagogical implications on even the most challenging of student populations. The likelihood that other schools and programs may find similar improvements in students from more traditional backgrounds seems sensible.

### Implications for Administrators

The results of both research and practice show that a relationship exists between participation in service-learning activities and how the participants view themselves and their worth in the community and in their school. The experience of integrating curriculum via this pedagogical practices has provided many curricular challenges and exceptional opportunities, many of which might be of benefit to other schools interested in infusing service-learning into their curriculums while still meeting graduation standards or accountability mandates. While it is challenging to complete service-learning well, it is worth the effort. Teachers oftentimes share that they need both administrative and curricular support in reconsidering how they approach teaching when using this experiential

approach. Providing teachers with guidance, professional support, training and technical assistance, and financial support can be of great importance in ensuring the success of a program.

### Giving Voice to the Community and Power

School systems across the country are facing increasing pressure to align the performances in their classrooms with state standards, a challenge that on the surface is easily met and not of issue. However, most teachers are feeling the pressure to teach the standards that are evidenced on state high stakes tests. Standards-based practice were initially designed to afford teachers the ability to understand what competencies students should master throughout their years in primary, intermediate, and secondary education. What has transpired, however, is far from this: students are being taught a test, teachers are being forced to teach passively, and schools are reeling under the pressure to meet a system of accountability that may or may not have any validity in demonstrating student achievement (Sacks, 1999).

Rather than supporting the pedagogical skills that we know are effective in supporting high achievement and cognitive growth in students, many teachers feel that this system of accountability only supports passive learning in a limited educational environment (Kohn, 2000). Informal evidence suggests that many of the schools have only become more engrained in the practice of “teaching to the test;” however, some schools, especially those who work with marginalized populations or nontraditional student populations, cannot meet these performances (nor have they ever), not as a result of inability, nor based on the efforts or dedication of their educators.

Schools who work with marginalized, multiethnic, or nontraditional student populations often are called upon to meet standards using an assessment package that was never designed with them in mind. Rather than utilizing standardized test scores to demonstrate proficiency and school improvement, schools are using accountability challenges and professional development programs to create innovative and nontraditional curriculum shifts. Service-learning is an integral part in this process. Service-learning can provide schools with a loophole under high-stakes accountability practices: demonstrate performance via alternative means. Thus, schools can use service learning to create individual goals and performance indicators that cannot be measured via standardized tests, but can only be demonstrated through civic literacy and community involvement.

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Schools that employ service-learning across classrooms and disciplines oftentimes have a history of dedication to the needs of students who have not “fit” into the classrooms of traditional schools. Such schools meet academic standards by providing an individualized curriculum that meets standards, through experience, community connectedness, and collaboration. Such schools believe that all students can learn, deserve a safe environment conducive to learning, and have equal access to curricula that enhance opportunity to maximize personal growth, as well as contribute to the society of which they are a part. Teachers at such schools provide a safe environment conducive to learning, with opportunities for success, growth and wise use of time, talents, tools and other resources; but which also challenge all students to contribute to society, further

their educations and empower themselves (while still embracing the propositions set forth by departments of education).

Service-learning provides students opportunities for active involvement in the democratic processes of the school and community, at a time where community involvement and dedication is being mandated by state departments of education. Many researchers have identified the importance of students moving from the theory of the classroom curriculum to reality via involvement with their communities. It is believed that such transitions might afford a variety of schools the opportunity to meet the demands of accountability, by allowing alternative performances to serve as evidences of stability and consistent educational strength.

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